

PASSPORT



THE WEB COMMUTING IMPERATIVE



With new online collaboration and communication technologies at their disposal, today's business professionals can work from anywhere – and companies like it that way.

There's always been a strange ambivalence around 'telecommuting.' On one hand, it's long been a fixture in the business world, and many companies and employees alike consider it routine. Yet in many workplaces it's accepted mostly on a 'wink-wink' basis – still far from the norm, even further from the ideal. In fact, the very phrase 'telecommuting' suggests phoning it in.

Yet the topic now commands more attention, and has more professionals practicing it, than ever before. Companies that don't already have policies are trying to develop them, media and research organizations are analyzing patterns and, slowly, industry groups are trying to come up with guidelines. Decades after it emerged, the simple practice of working from alternate locations may finally be growing up.

It's about time.

Call it Web Commuting, and it's not just another trend. In individual terms, it means professionals can use online communication, collaboration and other high-function technologies to effectively deliver full performance without the restrictions of location. But perhaps more importantly, the practice is no longer confined to the individual sphere: Companies relish the freedom to develop operational models with a vastly reduced infrastructure budget, hire talent wherever they reside, pursue accounts around the world, and fundamentally change the economics of their business. Done right, it's a win-win for employer and employee alike.

When I led the Telework Task Force at the Greater Washington Board of Trade, I spoke with someone with the Washington Metropolitan Transportation Authority. And he says, "I don't like that telework stuff." And I said, "Do you ever work from home?" He said, "Almost every day." I said, "And you don't call that telework?" He says, "No, I call that working from home."

— CHUCK WILSKER,
PRESIDENT AND CEO, TELEWORK COALITION



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Web Commuting represents a potentially seismic shift in business and behavioral patterns. It could, and given current trends probably will, affect everything from the work/life balance and local traffic to tax bases and global outsourcing. It could, and probably will, upend fundamental notions of co-worker camaraderie, business attire, the basic notion of target markets, the traditional supply chain, the urban-suburban dynamic, commercial real estate, the average workday and a whole lot more.

(Almost) Everything Is Different Now

There are many reasons for the current move toward maturation. Just as the idea of 'telecommuting' as a viable option first entered the business mainstream in the '70s in the wake of soaring fuel costs, recent spikes in oil prices have prompted renewed interest in the idea. Time and patience lost through traffic congestion have always taken their toll, while environmental sensitivity about pollution now gets higher priority in commuter surveys. Workplace stress is an ongoing concern, and studies continue to indicate that some people are simply more productive working from home.

Then there are the 'millennials,' the newest entries to the workplace, an entire generation that came of age with the Internet, does everything else online and sees no reason to come into the office every day. (As many companies have learned the hard way, even in a challenging business climate, these younger professionals need to be accommodated with everything from flex time to casual clothing every day.) On the employer side, meanwhile, companies increasingly appreciate the freedom to hire employees who want to work from the other side of town, or the suburbs, or another city, or even another country.

And finally, looming over every other issue, there's the economy. These are hard times, and that brings out the best in companies and individuals alike; innovation can be key to survival. Right alongside the mounting drumbeat of layoff announcements, many companies are increasingly finding new ways to do more with less, and flexible hiring arrangements are a critical element of that equation. Companies will hire and retain the best people regardless of where they are, mostly because they have to.



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One other fundamental change: Telecommuting used to be about companies accommodating employees who needed to be somewhere else on any given day. It was kind of understood that others in the office would help out as needed, and cover for the absent staffer. But today, the one who's out of the office can be fully productive from elsewhere. And for their part, it's now the companies that are moving to seek recruits in other locations. In some cases, having a representative on the other coast is a critical business asset. In others, it saves infrastructure expenses (space, supplies, etc.). But a lot of the time, interestingly, it simply doesn't matter.

Whatever the reason for the new popularity of this practice – and it's likely a combination of all these and many others – there's one common factor: The emergence of new tools and technologies that enable full-on communication and collaboration with co-workers, partners, prospects and customers anywhere, anytime. While for many business professionals it's mainly about cell phones and wireless e-mail, there's also now a host of Internet-based tools for everything from one-on-one technical support to full-tilt seminars with hundreds of (online) attendees. Collectively, these technologies make physical distance and geographical boundaries virtually a non-issue. As these products and services become increasingly integrated into the business mainstream, and as employees get to know them better and count on them more, the trend toward working from alternate locations should escalate even faster.

It's not for everyone, of course, and probably never will be. But with the right technologies and policies in place, the bottom line is that a lot more people can get a lot more done without going into the office every day...or ever.



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State of the Market

Actually that's already happening. In fact, the story isn't just how big this phenomenon is now, but how much bigger it's getting. According to a series of research reports and market analyses, the number of individuals working from alternate locations on a semi-regular basis just keeps rising (and rising, and rising).

Here's a small sampling from the many reports issued in the past few years:

- In 2003, there were 4.4 million teleworkers working at home with broadband. Within a year, the number had spiked to 8.1 million, an 84% increase – *2004 American Interactive Consumer Survey, The Dieringer Research Group*.
- From 2003 to 2008, the total number of American teleworkers rose by 43 percent to 33.7 million – *World at Work*
- "Today, more than 34 million U.S. adults telecommute at least occasionally... Fueled by broadband adoption, better collaboration tools, and growing management experience, US telecommuting ranks will swell to 63 million by 2016. The impact of this expanding remote workforce... will force firms to expand their digital footprints, harness new social software, crisply define their culture, and examine their real estate and energy policies."
– *Forrester Research, March 2009, U.S. Telecommuting Forecast, 2009 To 2016, by Ted Schadler*.

That last estimate is particularly striking. The Bureau of Labor Services estimates that by 2012, the U.S. workforce is expected to reach 162.3 million. If the Forrester Research projection is accurate, then well over a third of the **entire working population** of the United States will be Web Commuting at least occasionally.

That's not a niche. It's a coming majority.

While every aspect of the business world is affected by this trend, one segment that's particularly intriguing in this context is the small and mid-sized business (SMB) market. Seldom featured in the headlines, these entities play a critical role in the economy; some 90% of all U.S. companies fall into this category, and they employ half the U.S. workforce.



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For these firms, online collaboration and communication capabilities have the potential to spark fundamental change the way wireless technology did a few years ago, and the Internet itself did before that. By enabling every employee to be geographically independent, these tools give smaller companies the chance to question every operating procedure, reach far beyond their traditional domain, compete for every contract, partner and recruit in their field, and perhaps change their basic economics.

If Web Commuting is a big deal for big business, it's an even bigger deal for small business. And that deserves some attention of its own.

Motive and Methodology

The purpose of this initiative is not just to provide yet another set of numbers that offer yet another snapshot of this potentially revolutionary trend. Instead, the goal is to take full stock of the latest quantitative data, discuss the larger implications of ongoing events and emerging trends and, looking ahead, suggest best practices and sensible guidelines.

Citrix Online is uniquely positioned to sponsor this thought leadership initiative. The company has long been at the forefront of developing new technologies for remote access, online collaboration and remote technical support. It's committed to enabling people to work from anywhere, providing the flexibility to better balance work and home, and to empowering them to do business in new and innovative ways. The company has sponsored other research efforts in this area. Most importantly, Citrix Online has long specialized in working with firms in the SMB space, developing solutions that are built from the ground up (rather than stripped-down versions of corporate offerings) to meet the unique and diverse needs of this broad community. Small businesses might not have much in common with each other beyond size, but this is a market sector where innovation flourishes and most technologies are mission-critical.

That's the impetus behind Citrix Online's creation and sponsorship of the Worldwide Workplace Council, made up of thought leaders, advocates and specialists from different disciplines, all uniquely qualified to bring new thinking to new problems (and new opportunities).

By bringing together such diverse visionaries, The Worldwide Workplace Council is also designed to foster multiple points of view, a further escape from the dogma of traditional business thinking.



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The Council is currently made up of:

- **Amanda Alexander:** Founder and Director, Coaching Mums
 - <http://www.coachingmums.com/>
- **Jane Anderson:** Director, Midwest Institute for Telecommuting Education (MITE)
 - <http://www.mite.org/>
- **Dr. Heather Antecol:** Director, Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children
 - <http://www.claremontmckenna.edu/berger/>
- **Kellyanne Conway:** President & CEO, the polling company™, inc./ WomanTrend; political commentator
 - <http://www.pollingcompany.com/>
- **Bevis England:** Facilitator, Australian Telework Awareness Initiative
 - <http://www.teleworkaustralia.net.au>
 - <http://www.telework.co.nz/>
- **Charlie Grantham:** Co-founder, Work Design Collaborative and the Future of Work program
 - <http://thefutureofwork.net/>
- **Emma Jones:** Founder and Editor of Enterprise Nation, the home business website (UK)
 - <http://www.enterprisenation.co.uk/>
- **Gene Marks:** President, the Marks Group; author, columnist and small business consultant
 - <http://www.marksgroup.net/>
- **Jack Nilles:** Telecommuting pioneer; author, *The Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff*; *Making Telecommuting Happen*; and *Managing Telework: Strategies for Managing the Virtual Workforce*
- **Joseph Sweeney:** Advisor, Intelligent Business Resource Services Pty Ltd (Australia)
- **Jerry Swerling:** Professor and Director, University of Southern California Annenberg Strategic Public Relations Center
 - <http://annenberg.usc.edu/>
- **Denise Tyler:** Founder, Mother@Work (UK)
 - <http://www.motheratwork.co.uk/>
- **Chuck Wilsker:** President and CEO, The Telework Coalition
 - <http://www.telcoa.org/>



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For this Web Commuting initiative, each member of the Council agreed to participate in a wide-ranging, qualitative interview that covered different aspects of this area. Topics for the open-ended discussions ranged from the historical perspective of telecommuting as a conventional business practice and its most popular incarnations in current commercial circles, all the way to evolving business attire and virtual office etiquette, online negotiations between people who never meet, and the prospects for commercial real estate in urban centers.

For the purposes of this report, Citrix Online also commissioned a comprehensive survey from the polling company™, inc./WomanTrend, a privately-held, woman-owned corporation founded in 1995 that specializes in quantitative and qualitative research and analysis, and provides strategic counsel for a diverse portfolio of clients in the political, corporate, legal, public affairs, not-for-profit and media sectors. The study from the polling company actually encompasses the results and analyses of three online surveys conducted with specific populations of 600 U.S., U.K., and Australian adults currently in the workforce, with an over-sample of 100 small business owners in each location. (Citrix Online commissioned a similar survey in the U.S. from the polling company, although with a different methodology, a year earlier and the two reports allow for some anecdotal comparisons.)

While there have been numerous reports on this subject recently, this study goes beyond the numbers to provide context, commentary and counsel. It combines the findings of the quantitative survey – which allows for unique comparisons between different international regions – with existing research from multiple sources, as well as real-world anecdotes, horror stories, projected trends and informed perspective from the members of the Council.

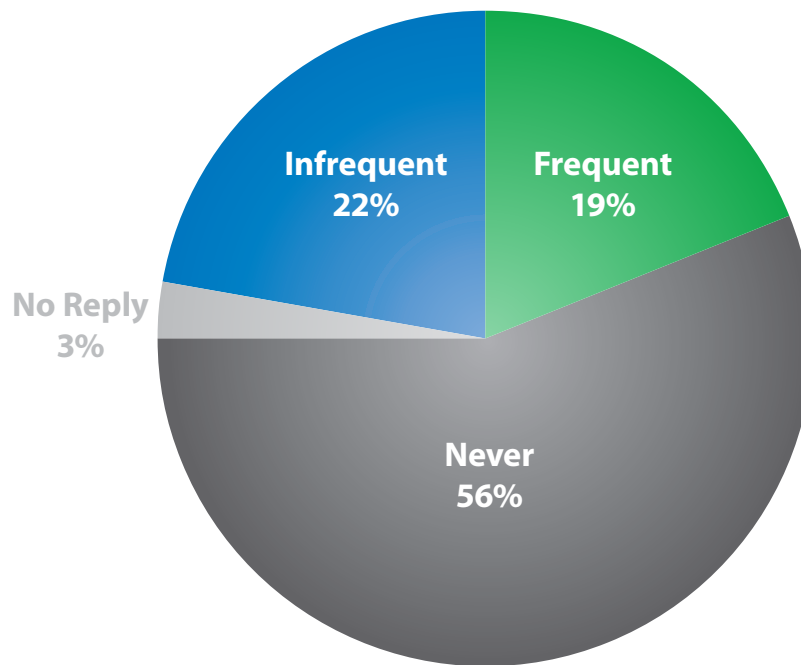
Findings and Opinions

What the new research clearly captures is a quiet but landscape-altering transformation in progress. The idea of working from home and other alternate locations seems to have become fundamentally embedded in the business psyche, and it isn't necessarily related to personal productivity or having more hiring options. People want to work from home, or just about anywhere else, **because they can.**

According to the Citrix Online study conducted by the polling company, nearly three quarters (73%) of all American workers, and more than half (53%) of small business owners, agreed with the statement, "In my current or next job, I would like to have the ability to work remotely – that is, from home or another location that is not my office or workplace." (And now for the requisite bucket of cold water. In a separate question, 56% of American workers polled said they "never" have the opportunity to work remotely.)



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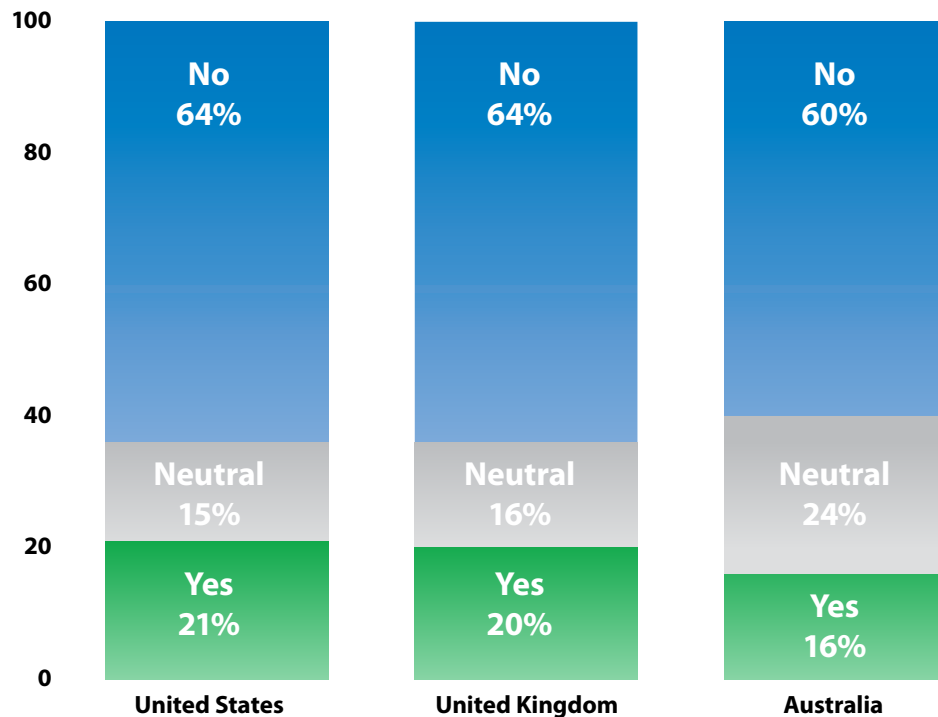


American workers who have “never” had the opportunity to work remotely (2008)

Just how much do they want this freedom? A surprising number actually say it's worth paying for. Approximately a fifth of the respondents (21%) in the United States (as well as 20% in the United Kingdom, and almost as many in Australia (16%)), agreed either “strongly” or “somewhat” that they would relinquish fully 5% of their salary just to be able to work from home or elsewhere, even for one or two days a week.



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Those willing to relinquish 5% of their salary to be able to work from home or elsewhere

But is this massive transformation in fundamental business practices more of an organic evolution than a planned migration? According to the “2008 Benefits Survey Report” from the Society for Human Resource Management, 47% of HR professionals say their organization offers telecommuting on an ‘ad-hoc’ basis.

In other words, this huge change is taking place in many circumstances **without** comprehensive policies inside the employer, **without** helpful best practices from industry groups, **without** government incentives or recognition for progressive companies, and **without** even full awareness of the online collaboration and communication technologies that might enhance productivity. (It’s still mostly e-mails and cell phones.)

There’s no doubt that the desire for alternative working practices is so great that it will continue to transform the traditional office environment. So given that the pace of change is already so dramatic, there’s an intriguing possibility to consider: If and when there’s greater organizational, government and industry support, as well as more familiarity with the tools and technologies available, will the practice actually escalate?



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Kellyanne Conway, who runs the firm that conducted this survey, herself embodies this gradual change. She started her company in 1995, when telecommuting meant having “a secretary who took messages on one of those pink slips of paper that had a copy underneath it, and relaying the stack to me over the phone if I were in a plane, train or automobile.” She emphasizes that her company could not have survived, let alone thrived, had she and her colleagues continued to work remotely under those circumstances.

But that was then. Today, when she can, she works out of her home, logs less time in the office with her staff, and freely acknowledges that Web Commuting is “actually an institutionalized aspect of our daily work lives together.” Conway combines a full, high-profile schedule that has her traveling a lot with a busy home life (three children ages four and younger), and acknowledges that it would be difficult without her current work arrangement. But she also represents the many individuals who adopt technology at their own pace, rather than going by what’s available. She’s heavily dependent on her cell phone and PDA, and is considering deploying more sophisticated online collaboration and communication tools.

Going much further with the fundamental concepts of Web Commuting is small business consultant and author Gene Marks, who says he used to have an office for his staff but shut it down. All his employees now work out of their homes (or wherever they happen to be), while he spends more than half his time on the road, meeting clients and other SMB owners and employees. “It took a little bit of adjustment to our schedules, but it’s evolved to the point where we’re completely used to it,” he emphasizes. “Our whole business is a remote operation, so we pay no rent, no utilities, nothing – it’s part of our culture.”

To make that culture work, Marks has installed three servers in his basement and a host of collaboration technologies in his home office. He continues to advise small and mid-sized businesses on the ups and downs of a Web Commuting environment, and evaluates all new technologies accordingly. For the record, he also spends plenty of time on his cell phone.

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Charlie Grantham, co-founder of the Work Design Collaborative and the 'Future of Work' program, may have gone furthest of all, building himself a customized facility in rural Arizona, 1,100 square feet of workspace that can accommodate small teams when face-to-face interaction is required. The strategy has definitely paid off.

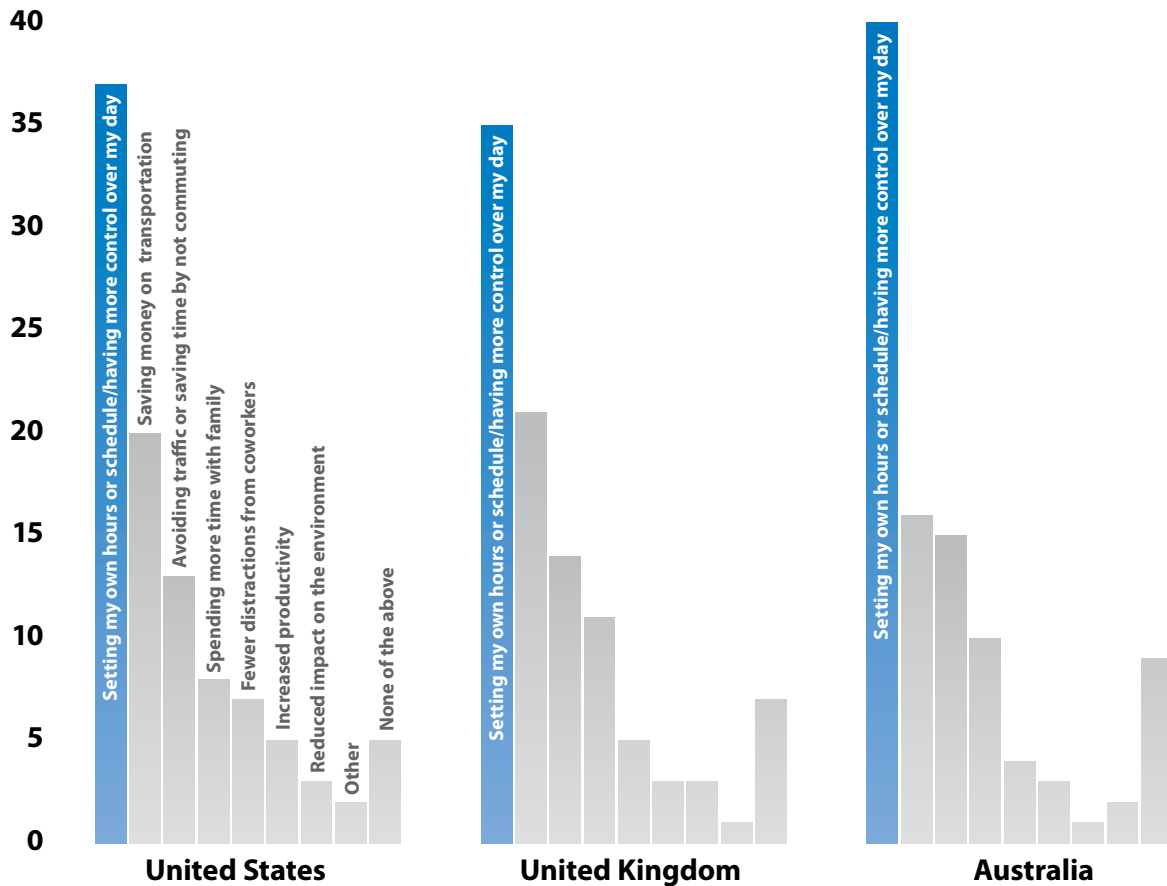
While enjoying his lifestyle and regularly advocating it to industry groups and other audiences, Grantham acknowledges the role played by technology. "If I didn't have high-speed broadband access and extremely cheap and reliable communications, I couldn't live here and do what I do," he admits. "I would have to be in a major city, so the technology actually allows me to live where I do."

So what exactly do people like about Web commuting? If you've ever found yourself watching the clock or trying to make sense of timesheets in the office, this answer will make sense: The No. 1 answer from survey respondents is that it gives them freedom from rigid office hours. (This is one idea that might not be subject to change: A similar survey commissioned by Citrix Online in 2007, also conducted by the polling company, yielded the same result.)

"When people come here to work with us, and they get the experience of being away from a corporate office, I never have to get in an airplane – they always want to come back here," he reports. "Honest to God, once they've seen what you can do with the technology, once they have the experience of the new environment, it's very difficult for them to go back to their gray cubes and big concrete buildings."



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Those who like telecommuting because it gives them the freedom from rigid office hours

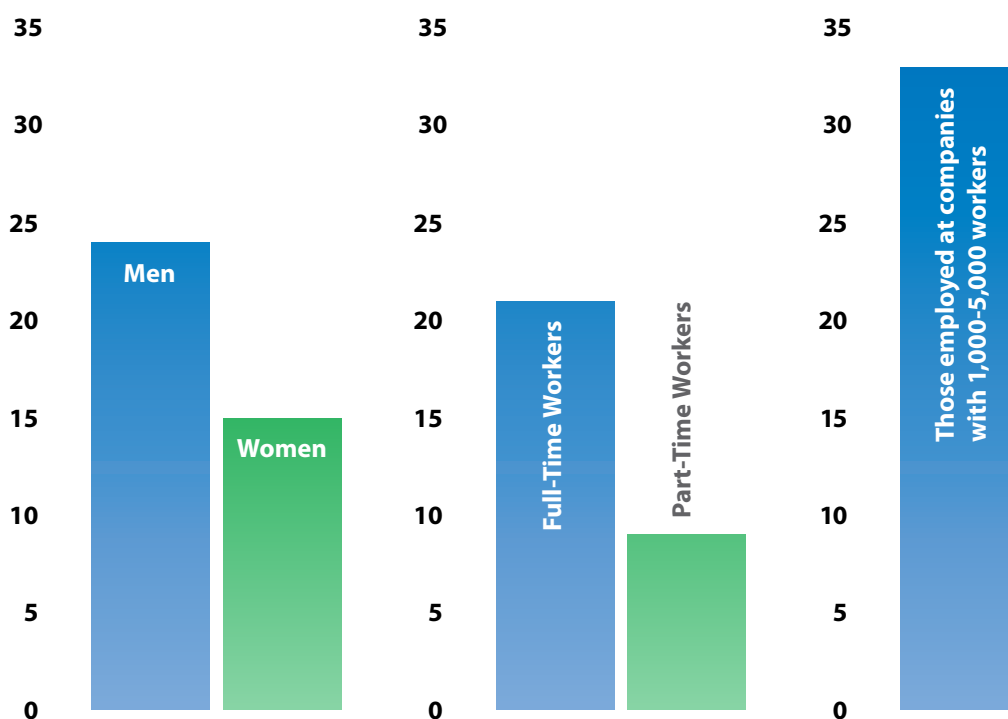
The idea of having more control over working hours certainly resonates with many audiences. "Flexibility is huge right now, particularly with highly skilled women, because the literature suggests that these professionals tend to work in jobs that don't allow them that type of flexibility, and then they get de-skilled because they have to accept lower level jobs in order to accommodate their family situations," says Dr. Heather Antecol, Director of the Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children. "So I think the idea of web access and working remotely is fantastic, so long as it is equally profitable for the firms."

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Management at many small business owners surveyed seemed to share this view. In two separate questions about the most and second most important in drawing superior talent, U.S. business owners felt that flexible hours were critical for retaining talented staffers. Most interestingly, perhaps, the flexible hours appear to trump more “traditional” benefits, such as bonuses or health care. As a result, flexible hours were also highly rated as an inducement to offer employees.

Here, too, money plays second fiddle to freedom: The runner-up answer to this question was the savings accruing from not commuting. Perhaps more interestingly, there are key demographic differences among those who cite savings as the biggest perk of Web Commuting. First, far more men make this claim than women (24% vs. 15%); full-time workers are more than twice as likely as contractors (21% vs. 9%); and those employed at companies with 1,000-5,000 workers (33%).



Demographic differences that emerged from those who cite savings as the biggest perk of Web commuting

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What's done with those extra hours, and how it affects everything else, is an even more complex issue. Essentially, the question of productivity, especially as it relates to the work/life balance, is not measured entirely in terms of checking off to-do items.

"After finishing this call [about Web Commuting] I'm going to my kid's basketball game, and then maybe to soccer practice, where he'll be for an hour and a half," Marks noted. "Instead of driving all the way back and going back to pick him up, I'll go to a bookstore and work online. To me that's 100% productivity."

Jane Anderson from the Midwest Institute for Telecommuting Education tells of a colleague who works from home for a technology firm, and makes it a point to spend 15 minutes with his kids at 3:30 when they get home from school. She praises the family balance this practice offers.

Nearly two-thirds of American workers felt they would benefit from a way to meet over the Internet with colleagues located anywhere, and share information as if they were in the same room. More than one-half of small business owners in each country surveyed were also attracted to this application.

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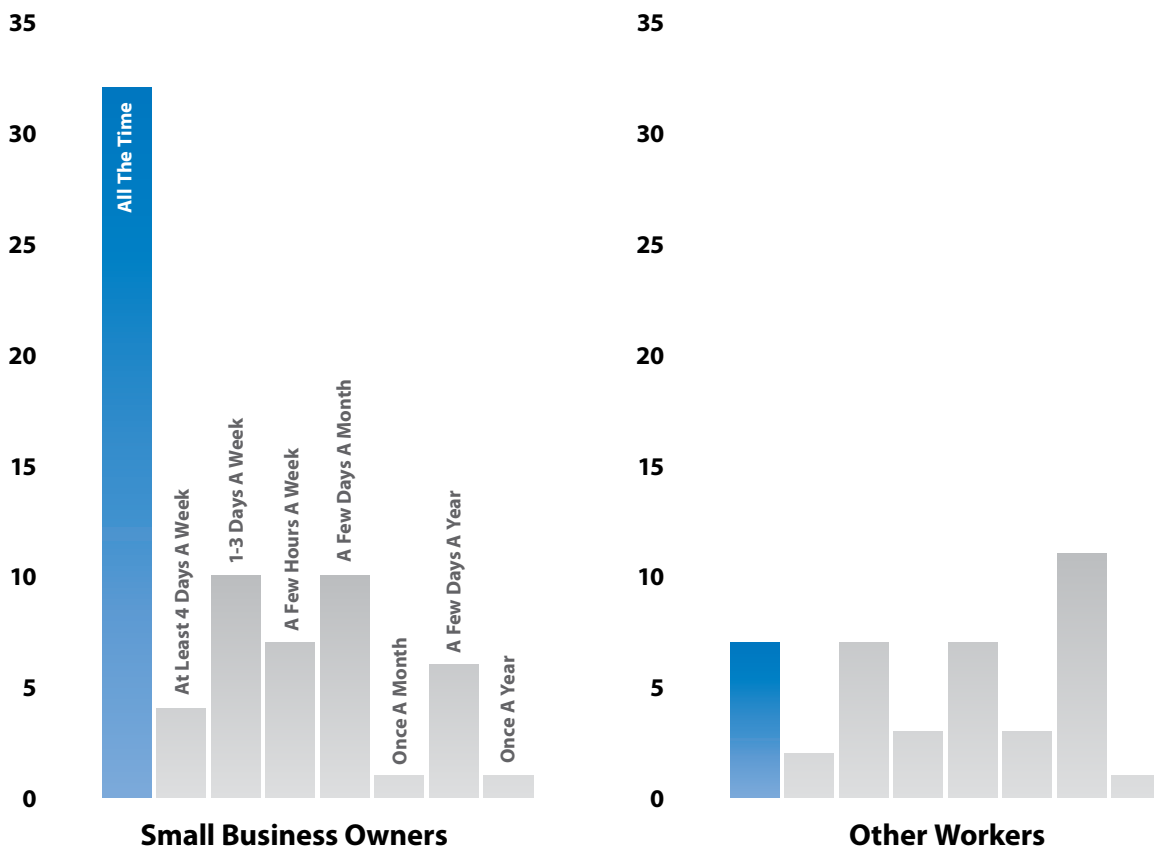
2/3 of American workers felt they would benefit from a way to meet over the Internet with colleagues located anywhere, and share information as if they were in the same room. More than 1/2 of small business owners were also attracted to this application

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Spending time in a traditional working environment has other drawbacks too. “In a regular office, there’s so much walk-by traffic – you have co-workers and you talk socially a little bit, but then it goes into more minutes and more minutes,” Andersen adds. Working from home, “I find that it helps me to concentrate. I know I have three hours to work on this task and I know I won’t be interrupted. That to me is the greatest benefit: you can get more done.”

But all this has to do with what employees get out of it – what about the boss? They need their freedom: According to the Citrix Online survey, small business owners are more than four times as likely as other workers to be able to work remotely “all the time.” (The transformation here is easy to spot: In the 2007 survey, business owners were less than two times as likely as other employees to work from anywhere at anytime.)

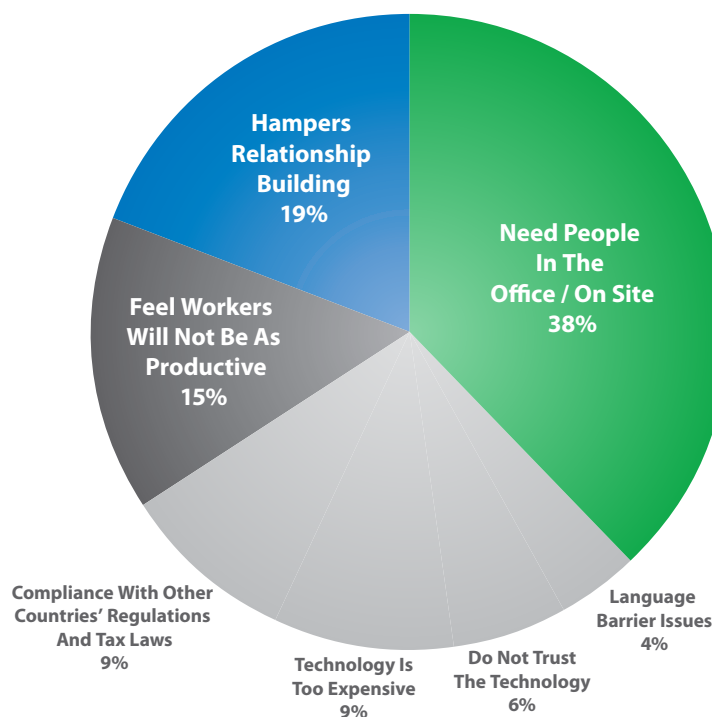


Small business owners are more than four times as likely as other workers to be able to work remotely “all the time”

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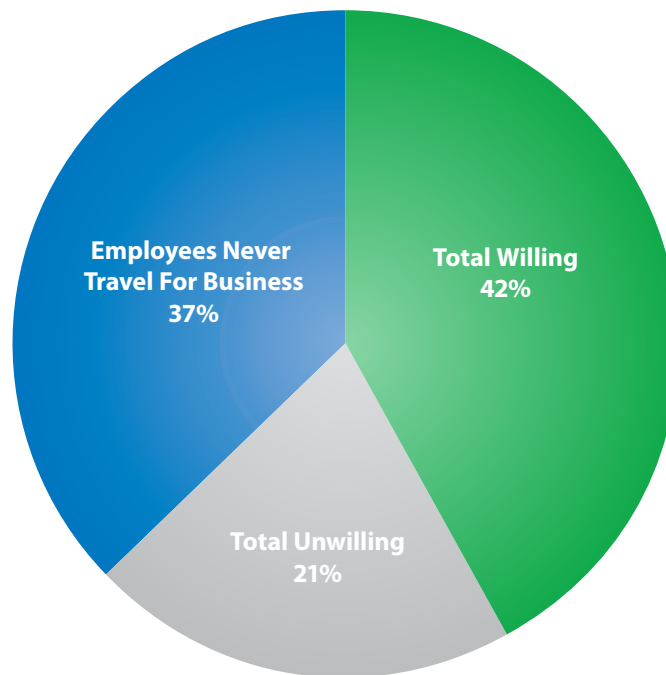
Management's view of flexibility as it relates to employee attendance in the office, however, seems more complex. More than one quarter of American small business owners believe job duties demand that employees be in the office, and working remotely just isn't an option.



Job duties demand in office attendance/working remotely is not an option (US – small business owner viewpoint)

Still, there may be some movement in this area too: Some of those management types are apparently becoming more open to the idea of employees gathering without traveling (sometimes). Almost two-thirds of small business owners in the United States exhibit some willingness to allow employees to participate in meetings without being there in person.

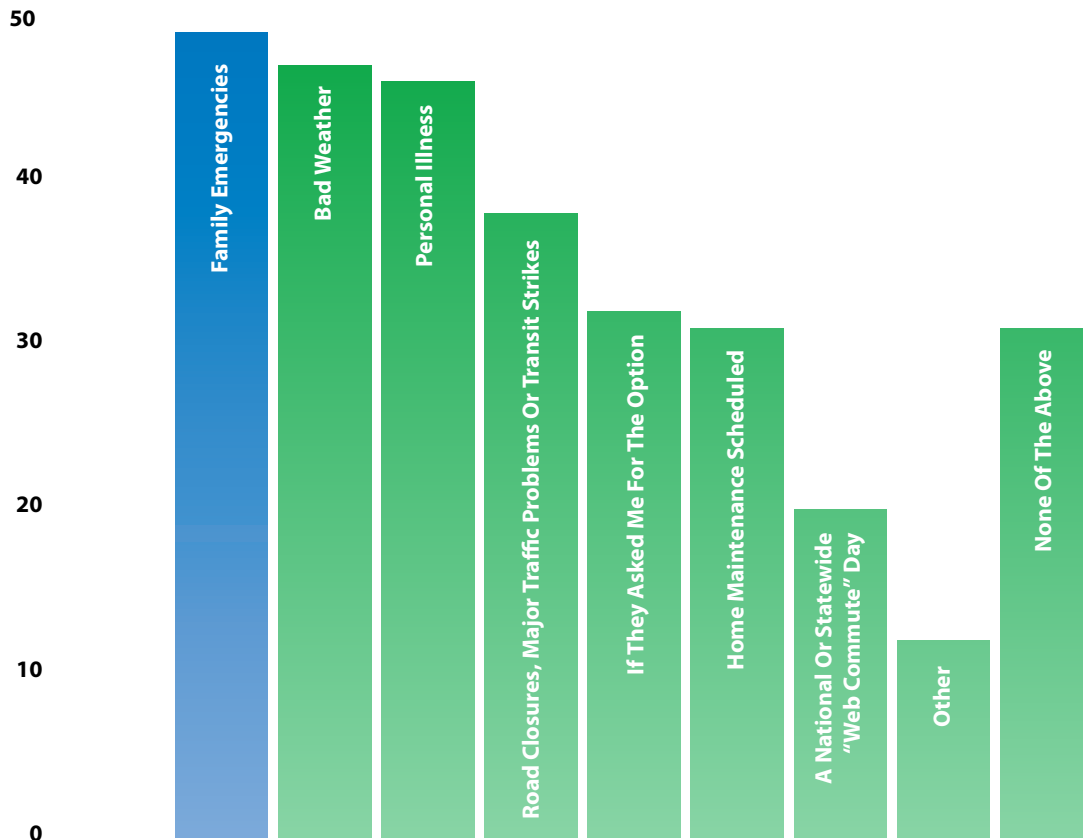
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Willingness to allow employees to participate in meetings without being there in person (US – small business owner viewpoint)

For the record, it's not as if management is saying staffers can stay home whenever they choose: The two most popular reasons why U.S. small business owners will allow employees to work from a location other than the office are 'bad weather' (47%) and 'personal issues' (46%).

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Why small business owners allow employees to work from a location other than the office (US)

Curiously, the idea of meeting online – in a sense the basic foundation of Web Commuting – continues to stir considerable debate.

Pollster Conway, who as a young lawyer hated the 'need to be seen in the office 24/7' even if her work had concluded, emphasizes that she's gone to considerable trouble and expense to maintain an office, complete with conference room and a recognizable address, "to have a professional place of business for colleagues to meet in person and receive clients." By the same token, she tells clients and partners alike, "I don't feel that Starbucks is the best place for a business meeting. I prefer a more intimate atmosphere where sensitive topics won't be overhead and baristas are not yelling out orders during our conversation."

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By contrast, small business consultant Marks thrives in the world of coffee shop business meetings. “In the northeast corridor, I’m an expert at where every Starbucks is located,” he recounts. “I don’t have to feel like I’m out of the office, and I have never used an out-of-office message for my email.”

Jack Nilles, who is credited with coining the terms ‘telework’ and ‘telecommuting’ and brings a historical perspective to the issue, has heard these arguments many times over the years. In his view, while no rule applies to every person and every circumstance, it can occasionally be beneficial to attend meetings virtually.

“In some cases, particularly during some forms of negotiation, you’re better off working remotely than face-to-face, because you can reduce some of the emotional interaction that sometimes gets involved in negotiation,” he notes. “There are some disadvantages in that people might think they lose the subtle emotional changes that come across in face-to-face communications, but that’s not necessarily all bad news.”

Looking past the employer-employee dynamic, however, the biggest beneficiary of a virtual workforce may be the company itself. Grantham, from the Work Design Collaborative, cites his own research to report that companies open to Web Commuting can cut healthcare expenditures by five percent, improve employee retention by a similar number, and potentially slash operating expenditures by 40% per employee. As estimates like these command greater attention, and companies everywhere come up with calculations of their own, look for Web Commuting to play a much greater role in expansion plans even at established corporations, and be a core component at every startup.

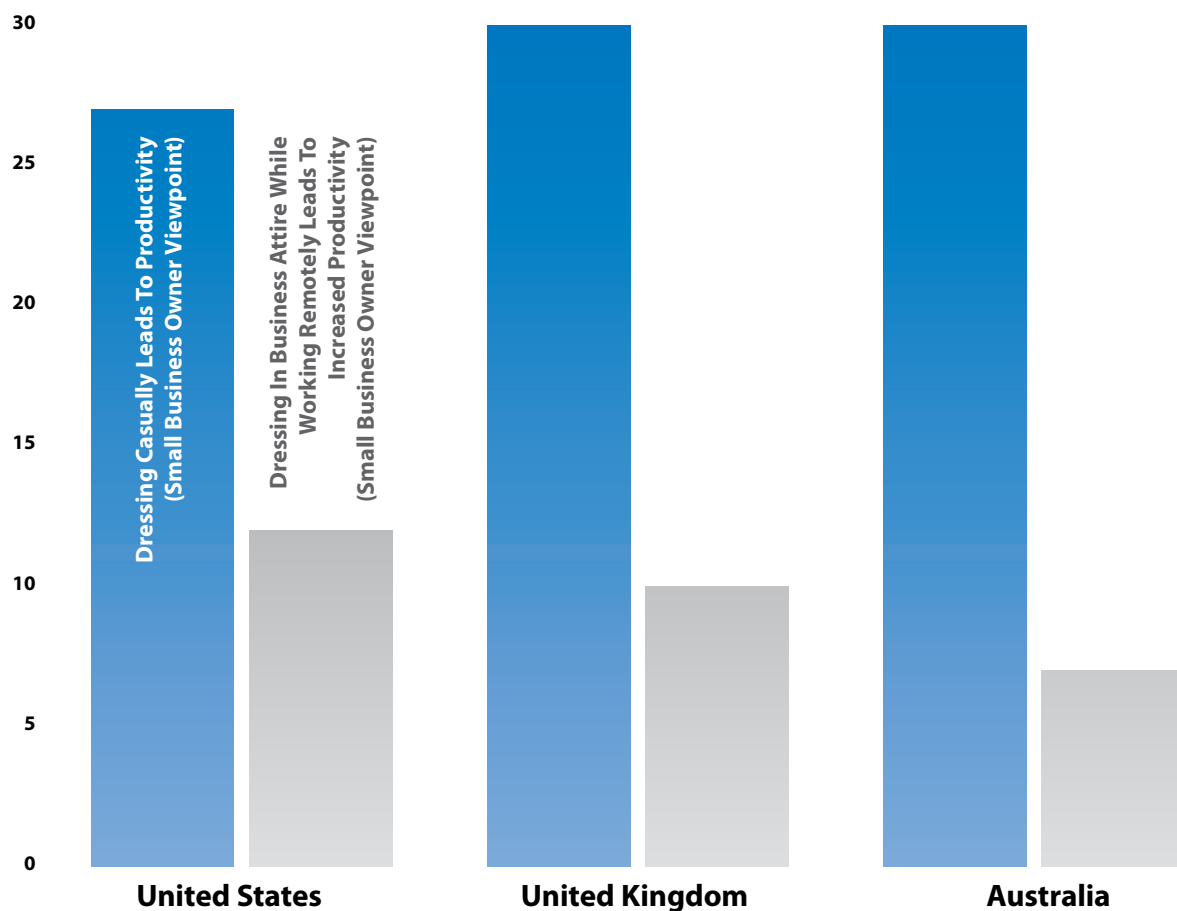
Another unlikely effect of Web Commuting is on business attire. We’re a long way from the business-suit days, of course, but ‘business casual’ is still a fairly recent phenomenon. Casual dress policies started gaining traction even before the overdressed ‘80s had ended, but it stands today as a hallmark of the New Economy. In 1992, less than a quarter of all companies had some form of casual dress policy. But by 1999 – surely aided by legions of dot-com workers in khakis – the number had spiked to 95%.

For those working from home (or the coffee house, or the beach), this issue is less relevant, but is there a connection to productivity? Anecdotal, we all know people who dress casually but get work done, and others who need to be at least a little formal even at home in order to get into the right mindset.

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The Citrix Online survey not only offers a peek into the need (or lack thereof) for business attire in the 21st century but also allows a cultural comparison between three very different environments. For the record, less than a third of business owners in the U.S., U.K. and Australia felt that dressing casually helped them to be more productive while working remotely (30% for both the Brits and Australians, 27% of Americans). Conversely, donning a suit and dressing as if they were going into the office ranked dead last among six choices in making small business owners most productive when working from home (12% US, 10% UK, 7% AU).



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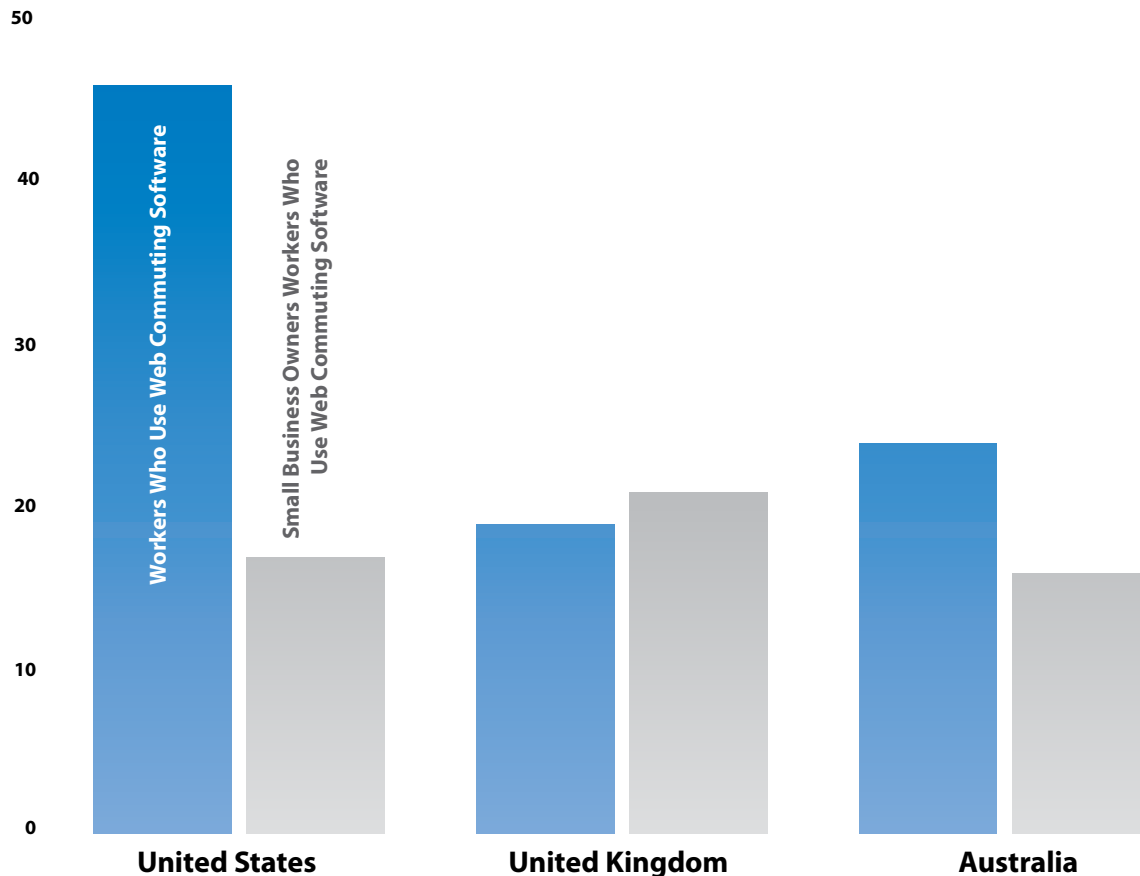
Some members of the Worldwide Workplace Council are vocal in their appreciation for doing away with business attire altogether. Wilsker of the Telework Coalition remembers how the advent of computers meant he would essentially move from his bed to his desk and start working, and not realize till late in the morning that he really needed to get dressed. Grantham remarked that he has not felt the need to buy a suit in a long time (and he meets with senior executives from large corporations on a regular basis).

Still, there may be room here for a separate but sort-of-related study: The speedy popularity of 'business casual' has definitely sent shivers down the spines of many traditionalists. Will the elimination of the need for any standard of business attire at all usher in a new kind of sloppiness, and will that affect professionalism? For its part, will the fashion industry respond with a new kind of Web Commuting chic?

And finally there's the common factor: Technology. As discussed earlier, cell phones and wireless Internet access still represent the highest of high-tech for many professionals. When it comes to adopting more powerful online collaboration and communication tools, however, there are some sharp differences between the different regions surveyed.

The Citrix Online survey finds that American workers use Web Commuting software much more often than their U.K. or Australian counterparts. However, the figures swing again when it comes to entrepreneurs in the different countries. Here we find that small business owners in the U.K. are much more inclined to deploy Web Commuting technologies than their counterparts in the U.S. or Australia.

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Those who use Web Commuting software

These numbers are almost certain to change as these technologies become more familiar and more pervasive to IT experts and tech-savvy individuals alike. In fact, everything about Web Commuting is likely to keep changing. As companies gradually formalize these practices, and employers and employees alike learn that they can do just as much – and perhaps more – from alternate locations while undoubtedly enhancing the work/life balance, more professionals will want that freedom, and more companies will benefit from it.

But even that may be just scratching the surface. Web Commuting essentially allows companies to completely reinvent themselves, pursuing customers, recruits and partners in markets and ways they could never have contemplated before, just as it allows individuals to lead very different lives, in ways they could never have imagined before. And that's going to lead to some fundamental changes.

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Grantham from the Future of Work takes a big-picture view of what's ahead – and it makes for a dramatic transformation. For example, “I’m going to be scared to death if I’m in the commercial office real estate business, because I believe about thirty percent of the commercial office real estate in the United States today is totally obsolete, and should be taken off the market,” he says. Next, if you’re in local government, and your tax base depends on having people drive into the city from the suburbs, “you’re going to have to take a fundamental re-look at your revenue streams and the services you provide to your citizens.”

But governments and local realtors apart, the most fascinating changes may be with people new to the business mainstream – they have literally the world at their doorstep. They can apply for, and get, the kind of jobs that would have been completely out of their reach before online collaboration technologies essentially obliterated geographical distance. They can live in Smalltown USA and work for a conglomerate in New York or a mid-sized business in Prague (and vice versa, of course).

Conclusion

It’s easy to dismiss Web Commuting on some level because the practice has been around in some form for decades now. But that would be missing the point.

Fundamentally, what’s different now is that the other part of the equation is increasingly active. As noted earlier, ‘telecommuting’ has traditionally been driven by employee need on the one hand and employer accommodation on the other. Few companies were actively building businesses that involved having staffers work from elsewhere. But the very fact that companies can have dispersed operations is increasingly prompting them to try it. For example, it’s become almost routine to have IT services in other locations, including overseas.

Web Commuting is still not exactly the norm, but there’s certainly movement in that direction. It’s virtually impossible to defy the logic. The number of road warriors now active – executives logging in to the Internet from hotel rooms or airport lounges – vividly illustrates how ordinary it’s become to get work done from alternate locations. But what if that same executive didn’t need to be on the road, but instead logged in from home, or from the beach? How would that be any different in the operational sense? Short answer: It wouldn’t.

THE WEB COMMUTING IMPERATIVE



However, it might improve the work/life balance of the executive. Similarly (and in this economy, more importantly), it might allow the employer to save on the office space and the costs that go with it. Looking ahead, it might allow that executive the opportunity to find a job elsewhere that doesn't involve moving the family. And it might allow the company to cast a wider net in looking for employees.

Web Commuting is not just about making life easier for employees (though it certainly does that) or giving employers the chance to keep staffers happy with flex-time (and it does that too). It's a completely different way of approaching business operations for individual, SMB and conglomerate alike, and the business models that it enables haven't truly been envisioned yet.

To use a cliché that may finally apply, this is a real paradigm shift, and it affects everyone and everything. Stay tuned.

FIVE KEYS TO WEB COMMUTING



Web Commuting continues to be an enigma of sorts: very common at the individual micro level, still of a mystery at the company-wide macro level. Consider the following descriptions adapted from guidelines prepared by Citrix Online. Web Commuting means working productively via the Internet instead of traveling to and from your place of employment. It's an arrangement between employees and managers that is intended to increase productivity, flexibility and job satisfaction. Finally, Web Commuting can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the environmental effects of commuting and congestion. Now, here are some common sense guidelines for companies to not just deal with but proactively benefit from this trend.

1. **Conduct an in-house Web Commuting inventory.** Even companies with active policies are hard-pressed to explain how often people stay home, and how this affects the in-office workload. As, say, the owner of a small business with rules mandating just who can be away and how often, see if you can answer the following questions:

- How many times a week does an employee Web Commute on average?
- Does this absence increase the workload on others, or have a negative effect on office morale?
- Do you think more would like to Web Commute but don't get the opportunity?
- Have you considered actually asking people to work from home?
- Have you ever considered hiring people in other locations?

2. **Research the topic exhaustively.** Full-fledged Web Commuting represents a completely different way of doing business, and it can be scary. Companies kinda sorta understand the benefits, but it's hard to make the conceptual leap to working in a virtual environment, even in a limited sense, when you're accustomed to the clatter and hum of a traditional office. But it's important to remember that as a business owner or manager looking to make this leap, you're not alone. You can turn to help from:

- **Non-profits** that have studied this trend
- **Consultants** that help companies examine the viability of having some employees, and perhaps entire functions and departments, located off-site
- **Government agencies** that can offer research and assistance

FIVE KEYS TO WEB COMMUTING



3. **Look into Web Commuting technology.** This is critical. Many business professionals who routinely work from alternate locations still rely mostly on wireless Internet access and cell phones. However, there's now a host of technologies that go far beyond those capabilities, including:
 - Remote access tools that offer full access to the hard drive on the employee's PC back at the office (also providing an extra layer of security)
 - Screen sharing tools to collaborate with others on every kind of document
 - Tech support tools to fix someone else's PC virtually (think of the time and money the IT department can save)
 - Web conferencing tools to conduct full-scale meetings, even seminars with hundreds of attendees, completely online
4. **Forget location, location, location.** Imagine, as a business owner, that there were no sacred cows. Imagine the freedom to re-examine your entire business from a perspective in which location isn't an issue. Now consider the following:
 - How many of your staffers do you really need to have in physical proximity?
 - If you had the guarantee that work would not suffer in any way, how willing would you be to hire people in other locations?
 - If it didn't matter whether your employees were in Mendham (New Jersey), Meridian (Mississippi) or Mumbai (India), how would it affect your budget?
 - How much money would you save on infrastructure costs – real estate, parking, taxes, operations, supplies, etc. – if out of a staff of 15, you had only five in a central facility?
5. **Take charge – set the tone, and the policy.** Be proactive instead of reactive. Develop policies built around the following concepts:
 - Only a handful of staffers need to be in the central facility on a regular basis
 - With location a non-issue, cast a wider net for the right talent, perhaps even going overseas
 - Use the money saved from Web Commuting to invest in employee development and organizational success.

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